

# Blackfoot Creation and Origin Myths

edited by



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This collection of narratives was made among the several divisions of the Blackfoot Indians during the years 1903-1907. In rendering these narratives explanatory matter supplied by the Native-American narrator is indicated by parenthesis, that supplied by the translator or editor (Clark Wissler or D. C. Duvall) is indicated by brackets.

## The Making of the Earth

During the flood, Old Man was sitting on the highest mountain with all the beasts. The flood was caused by the above people, because the baby (a fungus) of the woman who married a star was heedlessly torn in pieces by an Indian child.

Old Man sent the Otter down to get some earth. For a long time he waited, then the Otter came up dead. Old Man examined its feet, but found nothing on them. Next he sent Beaver down, but after a long time he also came up drowned. Again nothing was found on his feet. He sent Muskrat to dive next. Muskrat also was drowned.

At length he sent the Duck (?). It was drowned, but in its paw held some earth. Old Man saw it, put it in his hand, feigned putting it on the water three times, and at last dropped it. Then the above-people sent rain, and everything grew on the earth.

- Source: Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, [Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians](#) (New York: Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, 1908), [v. 2., part 1., p. 19.](#)
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## Languages Confused on a Mountain

After the flood, Old Man mixed water with different colors. He whistled, and all the people came together.

He gave one man a cup of one kind of water, saying, "You will be chief of these people here."

To another man he gave differently colored water, and so on. The Blackfoot, Piegan, and Blood all received black water.

Then he said to the people, "Talk," and they all talked differently; but those who drank black water spoke the same.

This happened on the highest mountain in the Montana Reservation [Chief Mountain?].

- Source: Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, [Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians](#) (New York: Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, 1908), [v. 2., part 1., p. 19.](#)
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## Order of Life and Death

There was once a time when there were but two persons in the world, Old Man and Old Woman. One time, when they were traveling about, Old Man met Old Woman, who said, "Now, let us come to an agreement of some kind; let us decide how the people shall live."

"Well," said Old Man, " I am to have the first say in everything."

To this Old Woman agreed, provided she had the second say.

Then Old Man began, "The women are to tan the hides. When they do this, they are to rub brains on them to make them soft; they are to scrape them well with scraping tools, etc. But all this they are to do very quickly, for it will not be very hard work."

"No, I will not agree to this," said Old Woman. "They must tan the hide in the way you say; but it must be made very hard work, and take a long time, so that the good workers may be found out."

"Well", said Old Man, "let the people have eyes and mouths in their faces; but they shall be straight up and down."

"No," said Old Woman, "we will not have them that way. We will have the eyes and mouth in the faces, as you say; but they shall all be set crosswise."

"Well," said Old Man, "the people shall have ten fingers on each hand."

"Oh, no!" said Old Woman. "That will be too many. They will be in the way. There shall be four fingers and one thumb on each hand."

"Well," said Old Man, "we shall beget children. The genitals shall be at our navels."

"No," said Old Woman, "that will make childbearing too easy; the people will not care for their children. The genitals shall be at the pubes."

So they went on until they had provided for everything in the lives of the people that were to be. Then Old Woman asked what they should do about life and death.

Should the people always live, or should they die? They had some difficulty in agreeing on this; but finally Old Man said, "I will tell you what I will do. I will throw a buffalo chip into the water, and, if it floats, the people die for four days and live again. But, if it sinks, they will die forever."

So he threw it in, and it floated.

"No," said Old Woman, "we will not decide in that way. I will throw in this rock. If it floats, the people will die for four days. If it sinks, the people will die forever."

Then Old Woman threw the rock out into the water, and it sank to the bottom.

"There," said she, "it is better for the people to die forever; for, if they did not die forever, they would never feel sorry for each other, and there would be no sympathy in the world."

"Well," said Old Man, let it be that way."

After a time Old Woman had a daughter, who died. She was very sorry now that it had been fixed so that people died forever. So she said to Old Man, "Let us have our say over again."

"No," said he, "we fixed it once."

- Source: Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, [Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians](#) (New York: Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, 1908), [v. 2., part 1., pp. 19-21.](#)
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## Why People Die Forever

One time Old Man said to Old Woman, "People will never die."

Oh! " said Old Woman, "that will never do; because, if people live always, there will be too many people in the world."

"Well," said, Old Man, "we do not want to die forever. We shall die for four days and then come to life again."

"Oh, no!" said Old Woman, "it will be better to die forever, so that we shall be sorry for each other."

"Well," said Old Man, "we will decide this way. We will throw a buffalo chip into the water. If it sinks, we will die forever; if it floats, we shall live again."

"Well," said Old Woman, "throw it in."

Now, Old Woman had great power, and she caused the chip to turn into a stone, so it sank. So when we die, we die forever.

- Source: Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, [Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians](#) (New York: Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, 1908), [v. 2., part 1., pp. 21-22.](#)
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## Old Man Leads a Migration

The first Indians were on the other side of the ocean, and Old Man decided to lead them to a better place So he brought them over the ice to the far north. When they were crossing the ice, the Sarcee were in the middle and there was a boy riding on a dog travois. As they were going along, this boy saw a horn of some animal sticking up through the ice. Now the boy wanted this horn, and began to cry. So his mother took an ax and cut it off. As she did so, the ice gave way, and only those on this side of the place where the horn was will ever get here.

Now Old Man led these people down to where the Blood Reserve now is, and told them that this would be a fine country for them, and that they would be very rich.

He said, "I will get all the people here."

All the people living there ate and lived like wild animals; but Old Man went among them and taught them all the arts of civilization. (When crossing the ice, only about thirty lodges succeeded in getting across, and among these were the representatives of all the tribes now in this country. At that time the Blackfoot were just one tribe.)

When he was through teaching them, he did not die, but went among the Sioux, where he remained for a time, but finally disappeared . He took his wife with him. He had no children.

- Source: Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, [Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians](#) (New York: Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, 1908), [v. 2., part 1., pp. 22-23.](#)
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## Old Man and the Great Spirit

There was once a Great Spirit who was good. He made a man and a woman. Then Old Man came along. No one made Old Man. He always existed.

The Great Spirit said to him, "Old Man, have you any power?"

"Yes," said Old Man, "I am very strong."

"Well," said the Great Spirit, "suppose you make some mountains."

So Old Man set to work and made the Sweet-Grass Hills. To do this he took a piece of Chief Mountain. He brought Chief Mountain up to its present location, shaped it up, and named it. The other mountains were called blood colts.

"Well," said the Great Spirit, "you are strong."

"Now," said Old Man, "there are four of us: the man and woman, you and I."

The Great Spirit said, "All right."

The Great Spirit said, "I will make a big cross for you to carry."

Old Man said "No, you make another man so that he can carry it."

The Great Spirit made another man. Old Man carried the cross a while, but soon got tired and wanted to go. The Great Spirit told him that he could go, but he should go out among the people and the animals, and teach them how to live, etc.

Now the other man got tired of carrying, the cross. He was a white man. The Great Spirit sent him off as a traveler. So he wandered on alone.

The man and woman who had been created wandered off down towards Mexico, where they tried to build a mountain in order to get to the sky to be with their children. But the people got mixed up until they came to have many different languages.

- Source: Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, [Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians](#) (New York: Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, 1908), [v. 2., part 1., pp. 23-24.](#)
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